

AMONG the Japanese certain ages have great significance, so that when one safely passes those particular years he is made the subject of much congratulation by his friends. If anything untoward should occur in the period, it is quietly accepted with a shrug, as a case of *shikata-ga-nai*, or "can't be helped."

It was on such an occasion that I was the happy recipient of a politely worded invitation (on a postal-card) to be at the house of a Christian, to help congratulate his mother upon having arrived safely at the felicitous age of sixty-one.

We found our friend's house on a quiet street of Tokio. As we neared the house we saw the woman in whose honor the guests were called standing at the front door, in her best robes of black silk, beaming a welcome upon the guests, who came tramping up, each bearing a present done up in a gay piece of silk or a brilliant bandana handkerchief. Our humble offering was a basket of oranges and a box of variegated sewing-silk.

The heroine of the day seemed young for her years, and wore her jet-black, glossy hair cut short in sign of widowhood, while her eyebrows were shaved and her teeth dyed black. She shook hands with us and drew us in, after we had removed our shoes, and led us to her fine-looking son and his pretty little wife, who came forward with an effusive welcome. We then were turned adrift in a suite of rooms filled with people of all ages, but all in the gayest of spirits.

Some were up-stairs taking in the fine view, others were playing a game of Japanese authors, a pastime that seemed to cause a great deal of fun and laughter. A young Japanese friend volunteered the information that it was the only game, besides battledore and shuttlecock, in which the young people of both sexes were permitted to mingle.

We presently were requested to be seated—not on chairs, but in two long rows on the floor, facing each other and extending through the entire suite of rooms. One of the pastors stepped forward and read a short portion of Scripture, after which he offered a fervent prayer, in which he asked God's blessing upon the assembled guests, and especially

JAPANESE EN FÊTE

A Birthday Anniversary in a Christian's Home

By CLARA WHITNEY KAJI

for the aged sister in whose honor we had come together. He then made a speech, in which he explained that as Mrs. Nakajima, sr., had passed a critical period of her life and was spared in health and strength, her son wished to gather the friends of his mother and himself to help celebrate this happy event. In old times, he said, and even now in some circles, such an occasion would be celebrated with wine-drinking and carousal, but his friends as Christians wished to keep it in a better way.

The son then rose and expressed his pleasure at seeing so many of his honored mother's friends present, and said that his only regret on that happy occasion was that his house was so small and "dirty" that he could not entertain the honorable company as they deserved to be entertained. He knew that they would be bored to death at the stupid plays that for courtesy's sake they would be obliged to participate in, but begged them to endure the ennui of their situation for a little while, as it soon would be over, and then they could return freely to the elegant homes and amusing occupations to which they always had been accustomed.

All this was said in the pleasantest of tones, with the most winning smile imaginable. He added that the entertainment would begin with a "tiresome game" called "*fuku-biki*" (lucky drawing), in which everyone would be entreated to draw a folded paper from a box, on which a number would be written corresponding to a number of a certain unworthy gift. "The presents which I am so presuming as to offer you are really not worthy the name," he said, beaming upon them, "being only some worthless rubbish I have collected, hoping it might serve to create a little mirth among those who have done me the great honor to enter my mean and uninteresting house."

The host then prostrated himself before the com-

pany, while the whole long line of guests bowed as one man to their amiable host, who with all kinds of deprecating gestures and winning smiles melted away and obliterated himself completely. A bevy of fair women now entered with the numbered papers and distributed them among the groups, while a young man stationed himself

near the door and read off the numbers. Each number had a kind of riddle attached, which the holder of the corresponding number was required to solve before the arrival of the present from the adjoining room. One was "A hint to more cleanliness," and proved to be a great besom and dust-pan, and went to a coquettish and beautifully dressed young woman, who was overwhelmed, much to everybody's delight. Another was "Open it once, and it must be opened again." It proved to be a few oranges done up in a straw bag. "Decoration of the Order of the Rising Sun" was a paper bag of wafers. "Two wedded couples" were two pairs of chop-sticks.

A bride's scarlet petticoat was drawn by a bald-headed old man, who looked with amazement at it over his spectacles. "A shelter from falling skies" was an umbrella; while a little boy of six drew an immense dried salmon, longer than himself, which he threw over his shoulder and dragged about the rooms until he was discovered, somewhat later, asleep in a corner, holding his fish in a tight embrace. A grave college professor drew, and was obliged to carry home, three immense *daikon*, or Japanese radishes, each about three feet long and as thick around as his arm, while his wife, a dainty creature, got a dish of immense roasted sweet potatoes.

The young women again flitted in, and left at the feet of each of the company little bags containing three oranges and three kinds of cake, with tiny cups of tea. Then followed little boxes of thin, unpainted wood containing lunches, accompanied by tiny chop-sticks and bamboo-leaves for plates, and soon we all were seated on the floor in social little groups talking and laughing merrily over our *bento* as we ate. The remains were carefully folded up and carried home, as it is considered rude to leave anything at a feast.

"PINCHED!"--By Julian Ollendorff

